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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

26 August 1952

FROM: Assistant to the Director

SUBJECT: Visit of Landrum Bolling, Editor, and Kay Sisto,
Managing Editor, OVERSEAS NEWS AGENCY.

1. Landrum Bolling formerly an ONA foreign correspondent has, in company with another backer, purchased the Overseas News Agency from H. R. Vishengrad as of May 1952. ONA was formerly known as a prejudiced agency within the trade. It was heavily financed by Zionist capital and affiliated in an intimate if unofficial capacity with the Jewish Telegraph Agency. Bolling reports that he has broken with the past, has thoroughly scrubbed out the agency, and has cleaned up the staff. ONA markets its service to approximately 40 newspapers in the United States. It depends for its news gathering on stringers abroad, generally utilizing the better-known and more competent correspondents of other newspapers and agencies. ONA relies heavily upon British foreign correspondents.

2. The agency is now in a reasonably precarious financial position, and Bolling is concentrating his efforts on a build-up of subscribers. It markets 5 reports by airmail each week including an Iron Curtain report. Charges range from approximately \$100 a week for the principal subscriber down to a minimal scale.

3. Bolling came to us after having talked to State on two principal problems:

- a) He is interested in developing more stringers and getting access to further information for his services abroad particularly in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. I indicated that CIA could not help him make these contacts, and I likewise asserted that CIA would not under any circumstances whatsoever provide information. He recognized the weakness of this position.
- b) Bolling believes that there is need for the development of subscribers to an independent American news service overseas, particularly in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, North Africa, and Southeast Asia. He believes that his organization is uniquely qualified to do the job

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since it deals primarily in feature commentaries and interpretive articles. He asserts that most newspapers are adequately supplied with "on-the-spot" wire news either as subscribers to the principal wire services or as hijackers of radioed news. Bolling does not believe the State Department is doing a completely satisfactory job particularly in the Middle East, and contends that if editors there were offered a legitimate foreign service at a price they could afford, they would be happier to take their news from an agency rather than from an official arm of the US government.

Bolling has propositioned the Ford Foundation on a plan to underwrite the cost of this news distribution since it obviously cannot be maintained on a sound economic footing. He proposes that the Ford Foundation establish an eleemosynary organization for the collection and editing of news which would benefit the Western world if published abroad. This organization would then contract for the distribution of its product to subscribers abroad through the offices of OMA. He wanted us to be informed on this proposition in the event the Ford Foundation queries us on our views.

4. As a parting shot, Miss Sisto asked if CIA might be interested in subscribing to the OMA service. I told her I doubted that it would be useful to us but that I would sound out our people on it.

5. Attached are a few offsets on OMA material together with a couple of weekly reports and a copy of OMA's proposal to the Ford Foundation.

C. B. HANSEN
Colonel, USAF

ODCI/CBH/hmb

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1 - ED/A

✓ 1 - General Counsel and copy of Proposal

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A Proposal
for
An International Information Foundation
To Promote
The Exchange of Press Materials Among Countries of the Free World

Purpose

To establish the facilities for collecting, editing and processing background information about significant developments and viewpoints in economics, politics, and scientific and cultural affairs within the United States and other countries in various parts of the world and to distribute this material, through normal press channels, to the newspapers and magazines of the free nations. Emphasis would be placed not upon "spot-news," with which the international press associations are already primarily concerned, but upon the kind of feature and analytical reporting which are sorely needed to provide the basis for any mass understanding of important events and trends in various phases of world affairs. Special efforts would be made to introduce into the stream of "news" more adequate coverage of the non-sensational and non-political, particularly in the fields of religion, science, social welfare, education, international trade and the arts. In the handling of the entire service the over-riding purpose would be to present honest information without national, political or parochial bias in order to further a basic human understanding among the peoples of the world.

Project

A central administrative and editorial office would be set up in New York to gather the material and to prepare it for the most effective use. In time, regional offices would be established in the Middle East and Europe and perhaps, eventually, in Latin America and the Far East. The raw material for this information service would be secured from the following sources:

- 1) existing publications, willing to grant translation and reprint rights, so long as the articles met the proper standards of honesty and international objectivity. This would specifically include scholarly, technical and trade publications, as well as periodicals of mass appeal.
- 2) the official reports, press releases and bulletins of the United Nations and related international agencies. Vast quantities of valuable and interesting material are available from these sources, most of which is never passed on to the public in any way, because the press representatives assigned to these organizations are, by the nature of things, pre-occupied with the conflicts and "spot-news" events of the moment.
- 3) the official reports, press releases and bulletins of various governmental information services. Here again, large amounts of worthwhile information is available, but the press representatives to whom this material is now directed are so overwhelmed by its sheer volume and are under such pressure to cover the "story-of-the-day" that the great bulk of it is either ignored or treated in the most fragmentary way.
- 4) monitored radio broadcasts, reports of which are available through government agencies, particularly in London and Washington, and the monitoring reports of Radio Free Europe.

5) reports, bulletins, news releases and background material available from industries, scientific organizations, trade associations, and similar private groups.

Distribution

The Foundation would be primarily an information-gathering and information-processing organization. It would make its reports and bulletins available as widely as possible -- to libraries, schools, diplomatic missions and foreign offices, and to publications. However, it would have a special concern to produce a usable press service which would recommend itself on its own merits of honesty, thoroughness and objectivity to the newspapers of the free world. It should attempt to reach the newspapers in one or both of two ways:

- 1) To whatever extent possible the Foundation would attempt to promote a direct exchange of press materials among leading newspapers of various countries. A preliminary investigation has already indicated some interest in this approach from editors of such papers as The Manchester Guardian, the San Francisco Chronicle, and the Bombay Chronicle.
- 2) The Foundation would also make a large part of its press materials available for sale through existing commercial press services already operating in various parts of the world. The reason for this approach has to do essentially with the need to avoid the propaganda label which inevitably attached to any private or government effort to distribute news and information through other than normal press service channels. Editors would be offered the materials prepared by the Foundation at the normal local rates, however low, payable in local currencies, however non-convertible or non-transferable. The sales agency, in turn, would divide its returns with the Foundation on a 50-50 basis, the accepted practice in the syndicate field.

For Immediate Development: Information Service for the Middle East

It is generally recognized by close students of the Middle East that this vital area is one in which Western, particularly American, influence has sunk to a strikingly low point. And it must be admitted that Communist penetration has only a small bearing upon this development. Suspicion, distrust, fear, chauvinism, and sectarian fanaticism are epidemic in the region.

As part of this ferment, strong new revolutionary forces are trying to break the ancient pattern of feudal control, corruption and colonial exploitation. Those dynamic forces have not yet been captured by the Communists. They may be in time.


Meanwhile, the United States and other major Western powers have lost much of their ability to influence the course of events in the Middle East and are conspicuously failing to penetrate the minds and shape the thinking of the literate minority--much less of the broad masses of the people. Overt government propaganda is having and, by the nature of things, can have only a very limited effect.

At the same time, there are grave limitations on what private commercial news services can do in this situation. They are necessarily preoccupied with the "spot news" of the moment. Their revenues are so small that they cannot afford to devote much effort to collecting press material specially adapted for Middle East readers. Thus, the press field is left to far too great an extent in the Middle East to special interest groups which are either utterly venal and opportunistic or are linked more or less directly to foreign governments and local political groups.

Under the International Information Foundation it is proposed to establish a small staff in the Middle East and in New York to select, edit, and process a balanced and objective service of feature and background information to be distributed through commercial channels to the press of the Middle East. This service would utilize the services of both Americans and natives of Middle Eastern countries. It would not attempt to serve as an American propaganda service, but ultimate control would be, at least in the beginning, in the hands of Americans with a sense of concern and responsibility for doing an effective information job in the Middle East. Great care would be taken to avoid entanglement in the internal policies of the area.

Subject matter covered by the service would include the following:

- 1) actions of the United Nations and other international bodies which relate to the Middle East; 2) trade developments linking the Middle East with other parts of the free world; 3) the efforts of the Point Four program and the projects of Western educational and philanthropic organizations to contribute to the development of the area; 4) the experiences and observations of students and others from the Middle East temporarily resident in America or other Western countries; 5) honest interpretation of American and Western policies toward the Middle East, plus 6) such other topics as might properly be treated in order to further an appreciation of the resources and basic unity of interests among the nations of the free world.

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